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NATO seen cool to hot spots in Afghanistan

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By [Sara A. Carter](#) - The U.S. has to send Marines to Afghanistan because other NATO members don't want to deploy forces to more violent areas and have not come through on their promises to send troops, congressional critics and intelligence officials say.

The criticisms come while the Pentagon is planning to send 3,200 more Marines to Afghanistan and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates is publicly criticizing NATO allies for lack of preparedness.

"I'm worried we're deploying [military advisers] that are not properly trained, and I'm worried we have some military forces that don't know how to do counterinsurgency operations," Mr. Gates told the Los Angeles Times for yesterday's editions.

"Most of the European forces, NATO forces, are not trained in counterinsurgency; they were trained" for a Soviet army invasion in the Cold War, he said.

NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer immediately rejected Mr. Gates' remarks, telling reporters yesterday that NATO was up to the task and performing its duties.

Members of the House Armed Services Committee have for months been privately voicing their opposition to sending more U.S. Marines to make up for NATO's flailing contributions in Afghanistan's more violent southern region.

Ranking House Armed Services Committee member Rep. Duncan Hunter, California Republican, told The Washington Times yesterday that NATO nations must be willing to commit 3,000 or more additional combat troops or risk losing lucrative "American tax-funded" defense contracts.

"What I'm worried about is what's being pressed on the American forces in Afghanistan, particularly in the southern region with high combat activity," Mr. Hunter said. "The idea that only Americans will be willing to risk their forces, while NATO allies do so little, is remarkable."

Mr. Hunter had sent a letter to Gen. James T. Conway, commandant of the Marine Corps, in October asking that he not approve deploying Marines to Afghanistan.

"Installation of a new presence in Afghanistan will signal to recalcitrant allies that Uncle Sam is willing to allow them to shirk their fair burden in this war," said the letter, obtained yesterday by The Washington Times.

Several military and congressional sources have told The Times that Mr. Gates is putting a

diplomatic face on his public statements, but, behind the scenes, he and other U.S. military officials see most NATO countries as doing the minimum possible and taking on the least-risky tasks.

Senior leaders of NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan said last year that another 7,500 troops were needed to confront Taliban insurgents and to help train new Afghan soldiers and police.

"U.S. forces are shouldering the burden in Afghanistan," one intelligence official said. "The U.S. is not being unreasonable. NATO must be willing to do more."

However, several NATO officials privately told the Associated Press they were surprised by Mr. Gates' reported comments, fearing they would add to tension within the alliance, in which Britain, Canada and the Netherlands have generally stood by Washington in urging more reluctant allies to do more in the fight against the Taliban.

With the 3,200-Marine deployment, U.S. troops in Afghanistan will number 30,000. Britain is second to the U.S. with more than 7,000 troops in the country, while Germany has sent more than 3,000 troops and Canada about 1,700. The other 35 participating nations combined, mostly NATO members, have sent about 11,000 troops, according to International Security Assistance Force documents.

Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell said Tuesday that the Marine deployment "is for a very finite period of time," and "we've made it clear, this is seven months. This is a one-time deal; that's it."

As Mr. Gates' remarks spread across the Atlantic yesterday, the Dutch government summoned the U.S. ambassador for an explanation of his remarks. In Britain, Conservative Party lawmaker Patrick Mercer called Mr. Gates' comments "bloody outrageous."

"I would beg the Americans to understand that we are their closest allies, and our men are bleeding and dying in large numbers," Mr. Mercer added.

Later yesterday, Mr. Morrell said that Mr. Gates was "disturbed" that the Los Angeles Times article implied he was critical of individual NATO countries.

Mr. Morrell said his boss was not misquoted but "for the record, he did not — to the L.A. Times or at any time otherwise — publicly ever criticize any single country for the performance in or commitment to the mission in Afghanistan."

He said Mr. Gates was suggesting NATO, as an alliance, had not updated its training to include counterinsurgency operations.

Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also said yesterday that "the idea that this was a vote of no confidence never entered my mind or anybody else's mind that I've discussed this with."

But Mr. Hunter did criticize the response from NATO nations regarding Mr. Gates' comments, saying, "The numbers speak for themselves."

"The NATO leadership has become a social group," Mr. Hunter said. "I think it is bad for us to

simply acquiesce to NATO's reluctance."

- *This article is based in part on wire service reports.*
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